

Monday, October 10, 2011

Blight and Brenner repeatedly write of the need for empathy between states, especially the need for great powers to try to understand the smaller nations they confront. Castro's salutation at the end of speeches: "Patria o muerte" Fatherland or Death. Refers to Masada (188): The true believers there may have seemed crazy, but they were willing to die rather than suffer domination by the attacking romans...The idea is a very old one and has been repeated so many times that the wonder is that great powers have failed to understand it. This is how the Cubans see th world. *La patria* defines who they are; **external** control over that definition is the same as death. [bold emphasis added] p. 188

"In short, Cubans were and are willing to make the supreme sacrifice of themselves, their families, even their nation and conceivably other nations [all life!] as well, in order to—in order to what? That is the question too seldom asked outside Cuba, because it seems not to have a rational answer. This, we now believe, is the answer: in order to regain heir independence right up until the final hour. Yes, it meant that much to them—far more than what Castro often called" mere survival." It is safe to say that most North Americans reading this bare outline of the Cuban attitude will conclude that the Cubans have been crazy and suicidal [well, yes! Even though the attitude is very "human," in its nationalism], possessed by some mass psychosis perhaps. Or, at a minimum, they have been dangerously immature. Cubans, in other words, are beyond the pale, from that place a friend of ours has called "the planet of Cuba."

"But that is not our conclusion, and it is not the conclusion legitimately to be drawn, we believe, from a study of the details...of the Cuban reality at the time of the missile crisis... What we believe emerges from the previous chapters is a portrait of a leadership and a people caught, as [Isaiah] Berlin wrote in his classic study of nationalism, in "an all-too-human cry for independence...a cry for room in which men can seek to realize their natures, quirks and all, to live lives free from dictation or coercion." (Isaiah Berlin, "the Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism," in Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 259).

[But wait a minute! "Free from dictation or coercion"?! Hardly the usual result of a nationalistic revolution or movement! Hardly the situation in Cuba (or North Vietnam, or Soviet resistance to the Nazis!) Doesn't this refer to the ability of "nationalist" leaders to appeal to the transcendent necessity of freeing "us" from the dictation or coercion of **foreigners, "them"**? Even at the sacrifice of one's own life, or of the "nation" itself—or advanced life on earth (when the stakes rose that high, in the second half of the twentieth century, in Cuba or Vietnam)! (As the US urged on NATO Europe; or JFK claimed, on Oct. 22, that Americans must be prepared to risk to eliminate the "threat" from Cuba (or, really, to maintain US ability to threaten or invade Cuba, to avenge the Kennedy brothers from the humiliation of Cuba-I and to assure Democratic control of Congress in November, 1962 or avoid JFK's impeachment in 1963 or loss of office in 1964; and maintain US prestige and authority in NATO).

[Note the references to the Cuba readiness for total annihilation, rather than occupation. And Castro's encouragement to Khrushchev to initiate WWII—preemptively, at the onset of US conventional aggression—at whatever cost to the world. (Since it was self-evident that the US invasion would be met with the Soviet tactical nuclear weapons, and that all-out war would follow inevitably, it was better that the Soviets get the drop, even though Cuba would not benefit from this. He didn't suggest that the very presence of the tac nucs—a super-secret so far, which he had maintained without suggesting otherwise—be announced for deterrent purposes! Any more than Khrushchev or the Politburo seems to have thought of this. The US was about to walk, unaware, into an unmarked minefield wired to a Doomsday Machine, and Castro took pride in not suggesting that the Soviets do anything to discourage this, either by making concessions or by announcing the nuclear consequences!

If this isn't crazy and suicidal, it will do until something better. That isn't to say it's unusual, for a small nationalistic country fighting a war of national liberation (or “independence”. The North Vietnamese, too, expected eventually to experience nuclear weapons and invasion (according to Blight and Brenner), and refused to back down, even back off as in 1954. Call this courageous, call it patriotic, but (I) also call it crazy and suicidal, “all-too-human.” (I must say, if the Soviets had emplaced nuclear weapons in North Vietnam—fat chance, after 1962!—would they or the North Vietnamese kept them secret?!! Same situation!

Might the Soviets have done this, if not for C-II? Well, the Cubans might have noted—if it hadn't been secret (from them?) that the Soviets had removed their nuclear technicians from China after the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1958, having refused to give the Chinese any nuclear weapons in the crisis (though they did make explicit threats: bluffs), which led to the Sino-Soviet split, just as it led to the Cuban-Soviet split in the Sixties!

Caroline Arnold, today, Losing Hope:

I threw away the Obama button because I've lost hope. It's too late: our present structures, beliefs and habits are driving us toward extinction. Our information structures and media based on lies and misrepresentations have left us cynical, mistrustful and divided. Our beliefs in various magics – markets, powerful leaders, high-tech wizardry – have made us arrogant, and our assumptions of moral, rational and logical superiority have powered our imperialistic wars and meddling in the affairs of other peoples. Our habits of blaming or devaluing others allow us to scorn and punish those we deem worthless and deny them life, liberty and justice, education, healthy environment, equality of opportunity.